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FALKLANDS-INTelligence

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- U.S. intelligence agencies are collecting information that keeps senior American officials up to date on developments in the Falkland Islands region, government sources said Thursday.

These sources declined to discuss methods being used, but there were indications that sensitive listening devices are monitoring radio communications of both the British and Argentines.

Such "signal intelligence" is often more valuable than reconnaissance photography, this is particularly so in the Falkland Islands area at this time of the year because the weather is poor. There is much cloud cover, and the days are relatively short.

Signal intelligence can be gathered by ground stations, even if located far from the scene; by submarines, surface ships and space satellites.

Pentagon spokesman Henry Gatto refused to say at a briefing whether any U.S. reconnaissance satellites are gathering intelligence information from that area.

From other sources, who declined to be identified, it was learned that the United States has a satellite that passes over the South Atlantic region, but that U.S. officials have not ordered its cameras turned on.

Asked whether the United States is intercepting radio communications, Gatto again declined comment.

Gatto stressed that "we are not involved in aerial reconnaissance in that part of the world," that was a reference to the use of aircraft such as the high-flying SR-71 strategic reconnaissance plane.

The Pentagon spokesman said there are no U.S. Navy surface ships in the South Atlantic. The defense department refuses to disclose information about submarine operations.

On another aspect of the Falkland Islands crisis, Gatto said there has been "a routine resupply by the United States of aircraft fuel at Ascension Island," a British-owned dot of land in the South Atlantic, about 3,500 miles from the Falklands.

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